

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 03458 181101Z

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9652

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3458

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FOR ATHERTON FROM BROWN

1. REVIEW OF REMAINING FUNCTIONS OF THIS MISSION WITH AN EYE TO THE KIND OF TROUBLED ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH IT WILL OPERATE FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE DISCLOSES ONE OBVIOUS SORE THUMB -- USIA'S REGIONAL SERVICE CENTER (RSC), A PRINTING PLANT LOCATED IN CHRISTIAN-HELD SUBURB OF SINN AL FIL, EAST OF BEIRUT. I BBELIEVE THIS PLANT SHOULD BE CLOSED ASAP AND ITS FUNCTIONS, ESSENTIAL PERSONNEL AND, EVENTUALLY, COSTLY MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT TRANFERRED ELSEWHERE.

2. AS YOU WILL RECALL, WE CAME WITHIN A HAIR'S BREADTH OF LOSING TWO AMERICAN EMPLOYEES OF THIS INSTALLATION WHEN THEY WERE KIDNAPPED LAST OCTOBER ON THEIR WAY TO WORK AND TWO OTHER AMERICANS WERE TRAPPED AT PLANT FOR A TIME BY LATE OCTOBER/ EARLY NOVEMBER FIGHTING. IN RECENT MONTHS, NO AMERICAN SUPERVISOR HAS EVEN BEEN ABLE TO VISIT PLANT ON OTHER SIDE OF DE FACTO DE-MARKATION LINE BETWEEN MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN BEIRUT. WITHIN LAST TWO WEEKS, WE HAVE LOST AN RSC VAN ATTEMPTING TO TRANSPORT GALLEY PROOFS, ETC. BETWEEN EMBASSY AND RSC. PLANT IS NOW REDUCED TO EXPORTING FINISHED PRODUCTION THROUGH CHRISTIAN-HELD PORT OF JUNIEH (NOT A PARTICULARLY HAPPY SITUATION POTENTIALLY FOR PRINTED MATERIAL DESTINED IN PART FOR DISTRIBUTION THROUGHOUT ARAB WORLD).

3. FACTORS WHICH ORIGINALLY ARGUED FOR SITING RSC IN BEIRUT HAVE CHANGED DRAMATICALLY OVER LAST YEAR. I DO NOT BELIEVE KIND OF LEAN AND HARD MISSION WE SHOULD BE CREATING IN LEBANON CAN ANY
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LONGER JUSTIFY OR SUPPORT OPERATIONS OF THIS VARIETY. RISKS

AND PROBLEMS WHICH MISSION WILL CONTINUE TO FACE WILL BE GREAT ENOUGH WITHOUT WORRYING ABOUT HOW TO KEEP REGIONAL PRINTING PLANT IN OPERATION. IN REACHING THIS CONCLUSION, I AM FULLY COGNIZANT OF FACT THAT UPWARDS OF 100 LEBANESE EMPLOYEES, SOME OF THEM HIGHLY SKILLED, WILL BE AFFECTED BY SHUT-DOWN. HOPEFULLY, SOME OF THEM CAN AND WILL BE TRANSFERRED TO NEW SITE. WHILE WE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY FACE SOME FLAK FROM LEBANESE FOR CLOSING PLANT AND TERMINATING EMPLOYEES, WE WILL JUST HAVE TO BEAR THIS IN INTEREST OF RATIONALIZING OUR MISSION HERE.

4. THIS MESSAGE SHOULD NOT RPT NOT BE TAKEN AS INDICATING LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN PRESENT RSC DIRECTOR, DICK EVANS WHO HAS SHOWN GREAT DEDICATION AND REMARKABLE INGENUITY IN KEEPING OPERATION AFLOAT SINCE HIS SUPERIORS WERE EVACUATED. I WOULD HOPE THAT, IN CLOSING OUT BEIRUT OPERATION, RSC WASHINGTON WILL FIND FOR EVANS AN ONWARD ASSIGNMENT COMMENSURATE WITH THE ADMIRABLE QUALITIES AND FINE OVERALL PERFORMANCE HE HAS CHALKED UP HERE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PHYSICAL SECURITY, CIVIL DISORDERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 APR 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: vogelfj
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BEIRUT03458
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760147-0430
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760449/aaaabpes.tel
Line Count: 80
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: vogelfj
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 JUN 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <18 OCT 2004 by vogelfj>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: USIA REGIONAL SERVICE CENTER
TAGS: PINS, LE, USIA
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006